

# Health Education via Television

By JOSEPH GORDON

WHILE THE CONTROVERSY over education via television continues in the press, in periodicals, in educational journals, and around many a conference table, a modest number of TV stations working with medical and other health agencies have unpretentiously launched regularly scheduled health video programs. Most of these programs have been dedicated to promoting better health habits and attitudes in the individual as well as in the community which the TV station and the health agency serve.

How well these objectives are being met remains to be evaluated, but favorable audience response to current programs is a good indication that health education over TV fills a definite need for the citizen.

In 1951, in an effort to evaluate the status of health education via television on a nationwide basis, some 110 questionnaires were sent by the Baltimore City Health Department to all active TV stations over the country. Of the 64 questionnaires returned, 28 television stations which were not carrying regular public health education programs indicated they would carry such a program provided it were sponsored by a health agency. Sixteen TV outlets replied

that they then carried sporadic health telecasts throughout the year in conjunction with special health drives; but only seven stations were producing regular periodic health programs. It is surprising that, with this interest evidenced by TV stations, so few health agencies have grasped the opportunity to utilize this new and effective dimension for health education.

Why are many health departments, medical societies, and other health agencies not taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by TV for health education?

Is it because of a lack of aggressiveness on their part?

Is it because of their skeptical attitude toward the value of television as a medium of education?

Is it an unfamiliarity with a technique which resembles that of motion-picture production?

Or is it essentially because the costs of production are believed to be excessive?

Whatever the answer, a delineation of the Baltimore City Health Department's experience in television is offered here with the hope that it may help to refute some of these unwarranted conjectures and that it will encourage those who wish to utilize television as an aid to promoting better health.

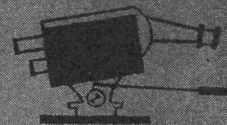
## Background

Baltimore's program (1-3), a 15-minute weekly series bearing the title "Your Family Doctor" rests on a triangular foundation. It is jointly sponsored by the Baltimore City Health Department, the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland (the State medical society), and WMAR-TV, a local television station. This triple bond gives the television series its

---

*Joseph Gordon has been director of the bureau of health information, Baltimore City Health Department, since 1950. From 1947-50, he was with the Baltimore County Department of Education at Towson, Md. A graduate of the University of Rhode Island, he attended Columbia and Johns Hopkins Universities for graduate work in education and public health. He was formerly head of the science department at the Stonington (Conn.) High School.*

---



**Left (reading down):**

**A fifth-grader shows the doctor what he's learned about dental care.**

**A mother-to-be learns about the Rh blood factor.**

**Adolescent problems. The doctor talks these over later with a guest specialist.**

**Looking for glaucoma. The doctor explains the leading cause of blindness among adults.**

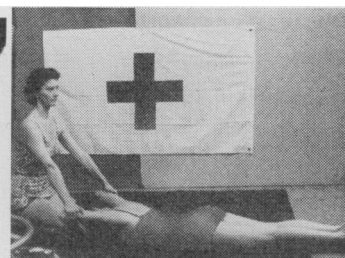
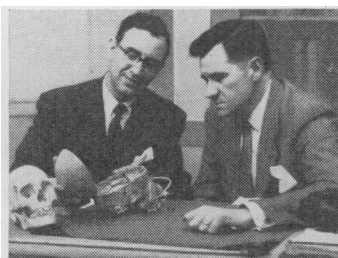
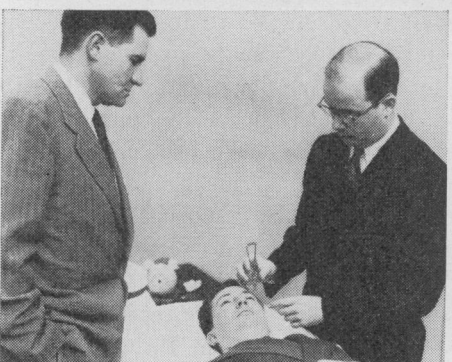
**Below (left to right):**

**Sinusitis is discussed with a guest specialist.**

**Red Cross instructors demonstrate the new method of artificial respiration.**

**The zoo director tells about snakes and their bites.**

**Prescription-writing and drug-compounding are explained.**



strength. The city health department is responsible for planning and programing. The medical society makes available consultants who act as advisers or guests on the program. And the TV station donates as a public service the air time and the technical personnel for telecasting.

"Your Family Doctor," the weekly program, was inaugurated on December 15, 1948. There have been only three cancellations since then, and these were due to election commitments.

Participating in this first telecast were the mayor of Baltimore, the president of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, the chairman of the council of the faculty, the city health commissioner, "Dr. John Worthington" played at that time by the former director of the bureau of health information in the city health department, and Dr. Worthington's "office nurse," played by a public health nurse.

The program opened with the mayor's special remarks on its aim and his acknowledgment of the efforts of the physicians of Maryland and the television station in making the TV health series possible. The president of the State medical society spoke about the importance of the family doctor in protecting and promoting personal health and the role he plays as teacher and family counselor. The commissioner of health described the kind of telecast to be presented each week. The "doctor" and his "nurse" gave a short dramatic presentation in the setting of the "doctor's office."

### **Purpose and Authenticity**

"Your Family Doctor" is designed to promote interest in and understanding of personal and community health. Its prime functions are to increase the public's knowledge of the basic practices for keeping well; to encourage consultation with the individual's family doctor when there is any doubt about illness; to present public health problems and their local application to the community; and to inform and familiarize the public with the activities of the local health department. In essence, "Your Family Doctor," through the medium of "Dr. Worthington," attempts to join, with skill, education and entertainment in the encouragement of good healthful living.

Overall responsibility and supervision of program production (4, 5) rests with the director of the bureau of health information in the city health department. Programs are selected on the basis of timeliness and need by a television committee composed of the commissioner of health, the assistant commissioner of health, key city health department administrators, the scriptwriter, the studio producer-director, and the director of the bureau of health information, who acts as chairman of the committee. Besides the selection of program topics, the committee designates well-known authorities as specialist advisers for each program.

The following procedure insures the authenticity and accuracy of each program:

A preliminary conference is held to decide on the information to be presented. The method of presentation is discussed and decided on. The conference is attended by the specialist adviser, the scriptwriter, the studio producer-director, and the director of the bureau of health information.

After the preliminary conference, a script is prepared and submitted to the director of the bureau of health information for his approval.

The director of the bureau of health information and the specialist adviser critically examine the script. They check on the accuracy of each statement and for the possible omission of essential facts.

Final approval is given, and copies of the script are prepared by the bureau of health information for distribution to the studio and the cast. The participants memorize their lines, in this way avoiding the possibility of misrepresentation.

### **Cast and Properties**

The part of Dr. John Worthington, the central character of each weekly presentation, is portrayed by a staff member of the city health department who has had professional acting experience. "Dr. John Worthington" was chosen as the name of "Your Family Doctor" because he was one of Baltimore's first health officers, appointed during the yellow fever episode of 1792.

Other members of the cast are recruited from the television studio and from Baltimore the-

atrical groups. Persons with dramatic experience are preferred as actors, but often staff members of the city health department volunteer their services. All participants contribute their talents without charge.

Properties are assembled by the television studio and the bureau of health information. Property items (props) have been contributed to the programs by the Johns Hopkins University and Hospital; the University of Maryland Medical School and Hospital; the Baltimore city and county departments of education; the Public Health Service and the Food and Drug Administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology in Washington, D. C.; and numerous voluntary health agencies.

### **Cost of Production**

Scriptwriting is the main item of expenditure. Scripts are written by a studio staff member for a fee of \$20 for each script. Having a studio member write the scripts has been a workable and satisfactory arrangement since the scriptwriter is then familiar with television techniques and the available studio property items.

During 1951 and 1952 an additional outlay of \$10 a program was made for the services of a professional actor who portrayed "the family doctor." The writing and acting expenses for this period totaled \$1,560 per year. An additional \$200 a year is estimated for the production of props—photographs, charts, diagrams, drawings, postage, transportation, and incidentals. Stencils and paper for script reproduction are estimated at \$100 a year. The total annual cost to the health department, excluding the services of staff members of the bureau of health information, was \$1,860 a year. This sum, in the light of approximate expenditures for other health educational media, films, exhibits, leaflets, and posters, is not excessive: Rather, it is a small sum when it is compared with the costs of commercially sponsored programs and when one considers that the health message reaches thousands of persons of all ages more easily and personally than any other medium of mass communication. The outlay can be greatly minimized by writing the pro-

gram within the health department and by drawing on a staff member of the department for the regular weekly appearances.

### **The Telecast Format**

Each health telecast follows a standard format which on occasion is varied to meet the needs of the program. In general, the following time sequence is typical of the standard program format:

*Opening scene* (30 seconds). A "live" or filmed dramatic sequence to catch audience attention.

*Standard titles* (30 seconds). Superimposed over opening scene whenever appropriate.

*Body of program* (10 to 12 minutes). This may take any form: a health drama, a series of experiments, an illustrated lecture, a film, or any combination of these.

*Guest specialist* (usually 2 to 5 minutes, but time varies according to subject). Outstanding personalities are frequently invited to appear on "Your Family Doctor" in order to highlight the program and lend added authenticity. Since the program is sponsored by the city health department and the State medical society as part of their health education program, their teamwork makes it possible to obtain such personalities. Guests in the past have included members of the Johns Hopkins University and Hospital, the University of Maryland and the University Hospital, the city department of education, the voluntary health agencies, the American Red Cross, the State and city medical societies, the health department, and other municipal agencies.

*Ending.* Each program ends with "Learn to do your part in the prevention of disease."

### **Range of Subjects**

A summation of the health subjects covered in the series is given in the accompanying table. Included under the communicable disease control classification are 9 programs on tuberculosis and 4 on respiratory ills. Other programs in this category were concerned with poliomyelitis, diphtheria, typhoid fever, measles, smallpox, ringworm, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and hospital services and research in communicable diseases. Five programs on sanitary

**Range of 230 subjects covered in weekly telecasts by broad classifications, Dec. 15, 1948–May 30, 1953**

Classification	Number of telecasts	Percentage of total telecasts
Total.....	230	100. 0
Communicable disease control.....	27	11. 7
Food and nutrition.....	22	9. 7
Maternal and child care.....	21	9. 2
Accident prevention.....	20	8. 8
Environmental sanitation and housing.....	14	6. 1
Mental health.....	13	5. 7
Special health department services.....	10	4. 4
Dental care.....	8	3. 5
School health.....	7	3. 0
Heart and circulation.....	7	3. 0
First aid.....	7	3. 0
Conservation of eyesight.....	7	3. 0
Cancer.....	6	2. 6
Conservation of hearing.....	5	2. 2
Anatomy and physiology of body systems.....	4	1. 7
Diabetes.....	4	1. 7
Geriatrics.....	4	1. 7
Industrial hygiene activities.....	4	1. 7
Lead poisoning in children.....	4	1. 7
Civil defense.....	3	1. 3
Historical—medical discoveries.....	3	1. 3
Miscellaneous personal and community health.....	30	13. 0

meat and milk inspection services are included in the food and nutrition group. Accident prevention covers home accidents, vacation hazards, and water safety. Special health department services include telecasts describing laboratory services, vital statistics, and special health district activities. Programs in the miscellaneous group were devoted to the work of the State medical society; the American Red Cross blood drive; the recruitment of student nurses; the activities of the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association; the work of the city's chief medical examiner; several community health drives; and a variety of ills including cerebral hemorrhage, sinusitis, allergies, appendicitis, and multiple sclerosis.

#### Audience Response

Prior to, and during 1950, according to WMAR-TV survey records of the television audience of metropolitan Baltimore (popula-

tion, 1.3 million), the number of viewers each week of "Your Family Doctor" was estimated at no more than 20,000 individuals. Early in 1951, this number had increased to approximately 40,000 persons. By October 1951, the viewing audience had grown to an estimated 75,000. In November 1951, a rating survey revealed that more than 85,000 people were attracted to the program. Early 1952 ratings indicated a stabilization of this figure. After a brief summer decline, an October 1952 rating gave the program an audience of 125,000 persons, exceeding that of many commercially sponsored TV entertainment programs in Baltimore.

A measure of the program's effectiveness may be derived from an abundant correspondence stimulated mainly by offering free literature on health subjects. Our correspondents speak of "Your Family Doctor" as being an invaluable contribution to the community health of Baltimore, of their friends' favorable remarks, of the aid the program gave in putting over an important bond issue for a public hospital; others frequently ask for additional information on the topic of the week.

#### Summary

Baltimore's program is one in which health information and education emanate from the family doctor as he deals with his patients and their diseases. Not only is the family doctor interested in promoting individual health, he is also concerned with improving the health of the community. In accomplishing these aims, "Your Family Doctor" utilizes every available source of medical material and every practical audiovisual technique. In so doing, it has enlisted the cooperation of every important health agency in Baltimore, both official and nonofficial. That these efforts are well expended is evidenced by the increasing number of viewers.

Can public health agencies afford not to consider using TV as a medium for disseminating health information to the public? Television is an additional tool in the hands of the health educator. The skill and care with which he uses it can contribute to the better health of the individual and the community in which he lives.

## REFERENCES

- (1) Mayor D'Alesandro and Dr. Maxson inaugurate new health television service. *Baltimore Health News* 26: 89-91 (1949).
- (2) Seeman, I.: The family doctor calls—On television. *Hygeia* 27: 462-463, 502 (1949).
- (3) Television's family doctor. *TV Guide* 6: 22 (March 1-7, 1952).
- (4) Poole, L.: Science via television. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1950.
- (5) Stasheff, E., and Bretz, R.: The television program. Its writing, direction, and production. New York, A. A. Wyn, Inc., 1951.
- (6) U. S. Department of Agriculture. Office of Information. Radio and Television Service: Television report: I. Films; II. Visual aids; III. Program methods. Washington, D. C., 1950-53. Processed.
- (7) Newsom, C. V., Editor: A television policy for education; Proceedings of the Educational Television Programs Institute. Washington, D. C., American Council on Education, 1952.

---

## Training Courses in Venereal Disease Control

The Public Health Service Venereal Disease Research Laboratory at Chamblee, Ga., has scheduled refresher training courses to be given during fiscal 1954.

Two-week courses in the serology of syphilis will be given on the following dates:

1953	1954
Aug. 17-28	Jan. 11-22
Sept. 14-25	Feb. 8-19
Oct. 5-16	Mar. 8-19
Oct. 26-Nov. 6	Apr. 5-16
Dec. 7-18	May 3-14

Other courses scheduled are:

Oct. 5-16, 1953: Management and control of syphilis serology by the regional laboratory (for assistant laboratory directors and senior laboratory staff members—includes review of interlaboratory training programs, regional laboratory evaluation studies, laboratory inspection procedures, demonstration of antigen check testing, and control serum preparation.)

Oct. 19-23, 1953: Laboratory diagnosis of venereal disease (for public health physicians, laboratory directors and assistant directors).

Nov. 9-20, 1953: Preparation and standardization of cardiolipin antigens used in serologic tests for syphilis (also to be given May 17-28, 1954).

Correspondence on these courses should be sent to: Director, Venereal Disease Research Laboratory, P. O. Box 185, Chamblee, Ga.